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3 WHAT IS EXTENSION WORK IN CHILD DEVELOPMENT CONTRIBUTING IN
MEETING THE AIMS OF A SATISFYING FAMILY LIFE?*

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During the recent appropriation season in one New Jersey county, a homemaker rose to speak for home demonstration work saying, "I belong to and represent the great body of homemakers who are unorganized and much employed. We are the mothers of preschool children - young parents facing new experiences and responsibilities, the significance of which we little realized. That the future social, mental, as well as physical health and well-being of our family groups is being determined hourly by our homemaking practices is a concern of which we are rapidly becoming aware. Our task is stupendous. But the home-economics extension service has brought to my neighborhood the means of interpreting everyday experiences in terms of the whole home and family; it has demonstrated new and approved practices which can be adapted even by the woman of low income; it has made us see the home and household as a unit and to evaluate, for health and better relationships, methods of feeding and clothing the family and managing the income and other resources." To the parent-education program belongs much credit for the attitude of this homemaker, for although the work is under the direct supervision of the child-training specialist, it has a definite bearing upon and makes extensive use of subject-matter material furnished by the nutrition, clothing, and home-management specialists; it coordinates the work of the home demonstration agent and the specialist; it has a direct tie-up with the 4-H club program; and it brings into relationship the work of women's organizations with the work of the extension service. Through these and many other fields of constructive, cooperative endeavor, the parent-education program has gradually expanded and developed until it stands today as an active force in helping New Jersey parents to become more aware of the vital importance of adult education and of an intelligent approach to child-training problems.

Although extension home economists have given attention to the relationship phases of home life, contact with parent education material has fostered the conviction that any program of education in homemaking must concern itself with the growth and development of a normal personality, with mental and physical health, and with those traits of character expected of a socially minded individual. This is illustrated above and also in the work of our specialists in the field of consumer education--where individuals think through basic questions both in regard to relationships at home and as concerns group activity beyond the family circle. The work done in the past and the

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enthusiasm with which it has been carried on has much to commend it, but often the emphasis has been placed on factors only incidental to the real issue and not always in line with fundamental homemaking problems. Home demonstration agents now have even more help, so that discussions in foods, clothing, and shelter are provided with ways in which the homemaker can deal with her family as she feeds and clothes them- "the fitness of the individual for life." Hence parent education serves to enrich the existing programs in all fields of homemaking.

Although our colleagues in the agricultural extension service are our keenest critics, as parents they must appreciate this trend in the homemaking program and see our need of their cooperation with it. Mr. Hochbaum's statement of aims points to our opportunity and place in a broader program. Surely, the influence of these newer projects is contributing so much to the worker's better equipment for her task that her program must, of necessity, become more effective in meeting the aims of satisfying family life.

In this belief, mention is made of some principles which the New Jersey parent education specialists are continuing to teach. Many problems, homemaking and otherwise, grow out of a poverty of experience. It is necessary, therefore, to enrich the experience of those in the home, thus developing more resources within the individuals, helping them to "see each part of life as life itself." If this be true, it is not enough to promise the future and fail to live in the present. Some say we face a "new leisure." In any event, much depends upon the way we approach the problem; that the preparation for it is "not in teaching new things to do but in developing the individual through finding new ways of doing things." There must be created "a healthy attitude toward change. Change is good; it is life; it is growth." Extension workers, like parents, "should not be afraid of the new, yet they must keep faith with the old and teach by example. Let us build partial goals and be ready to reassay those goals" in the light of newer knowledge. "The depression has made no new problems; it has only emphasized those that have long existed." The opportunity facing this service becomes more clear as the home-economics extension staff assumes increasing responsibility.

Because of the cooperation in the 4-H club programs of both men and women, it seems logical to illustrate this topic further by noting for you the assistance given this program for young people by the parent-education specialists. To quote Mrs. McDowell, "Club leaders are parents by proxy, at least while on duty, so why not bring them into touch with the parent-education specialist? This thought has led to a joint program through which leaders and specialists have shared experience and psychological principles for several years. We have a very definite plan for leaders' assistance. It consists of fall and spring conferences in each county with all leaders; special training meetings on techniques and round-table discussions at the camps.

"At the fall conferences, the objectives of club work are introduced to new leaders and reinterpreted to the experienced. Club organization is discussed and use of subject matter made clear. Psychology is very definitely applied to the problem of program making in that interest and freedom of choice

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within limits are cardinal principles. Since the clubs plan different programs, the training in techniques for leaders must and does take place as needed. This is accomplished through small training meetings conducted by the agents, assisted by the various specialists.

"The object of the early spring conferences is to utilize the experience of leaders as a means to a better understanding of preadolescent and adolescent behavior. We endeavor to help each leader to see how home and school influences, and also their own attitudes, affect behavior in the club. We try to encourage more progressive teaching methods and to develop an attitude of guiding rather than of coercing. We attempt to make these conferences very informal and begin, as rule, with a brief talk followed by discussion. We have considered the leader's attitude and the importance of her influence; the stages of development in childhood and adolescence; and how habits are learned. Last spring we discussed why girls join clubs and why, afterward, they behave as they do. We have made it a point to illustrate some craft at each spring conference in order that the leaders would have some concrete result to carry away from the meeting, as well as information, exchanged ideas, and possibly changed attitudes. We have also built up pleasant associations by having either luncheon or supper together. One of the most encouraging signs of advance is the difference in the leaders' thinking. They have ceased to be mainly interested in width of seams and shades of crust, and are more aware of their girls' general growth and all-round development.

"The parent-education specialists are staff members at 4-H camps. Their round-table discussions at camp offer further opportunity to interpret behavior. They have resulted, too, in revealing unsuspected talents in leaders, and in proving the value of group thinking on common problems. Camp conditions make it easy for leaders to bring to the specialist specific difficulties either in their own lives or in those of their girls.

"Through the State-wide conferences on parent education sponsored by the extension service, we have all, staff and leaders alike, benefited by hearing outstanding authorities speak on various phases of child development and the art of guidance."

Extension programs are directed toward the solution of outstanding problems, therefore the need in our work becomes "training for social membership." Since in life the many are called upon not for leadership but for a cooperative participation in the affairs of life of a community, "teaching to live, on functioning membership" is taught by participation in projects, by means of which one comes to a more thorough understanding of one's environment. Mr. Graham recently called New Jersey's attention to an excellent article in the Louisiana State University Alumni News which states that "A functioning membership will produce its own leaders when the need arises."

Indeed, parent education developed because of the insistent demands of parents for assistance. In this, is it not like the Extension Service? The movement originated in parents' efforts to help themselves. Is that not our goal? May the extension specialists in this field help to keep the move-

ment in line with its early aims and objectives, and not fear that it will fail to be academic? By so doing, it can help to bring about a closer integration of all homemaking programs, play a part in every contact made by the home demonstration agent, and aid the service in its growth toward full maturity. It is not unbelievable that growing mutual respect for individual differences and of the rights of all human personality may bring groups to the point where intelligent cooperation is possible and "brotherly love" a reality.



